



**Department of
Veterans Affairs**

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News Release

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"Shining Example" as Disabled Veterans Ski the Rockies At Annual Winter Sports Clinic in Colorado

WASHINGTON – Catastrophic combat injuries, blindness and paralysis will not stop more than 400 disabled veterans from across the country, including nearly 70 veterans from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, from taking part in the 20th National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic in Snowmass Village, Colo., April 2-7. The event is jointly sponsored by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Disabled American Veterans (DAV).

Coming two months after the world's top athletes competed in the Winter Olympics, and just two weeks after the Paralympics, the clinic is an annual rehabilitation program open to all U.S. military veterans with spinal cord injuries or disease, visual impairments, certain neurological conditions, orthopedic amputations or other disabilities, who receive care at any VA health care facility.

"For 20 years, the Winter Sports Clinic has been a shining example of VA's commitment to help disabled veterans recover from their serious injuries and illnesses," said the Honorable R. James Nicholson, Secretary of Veterans Affairs. "Also important is that their determination, courage and achievement become models for other injured people to realize what they still can do with their lives."

During the six-day program, the veterans will learn adaptive Alpine and Nordic skiing and be introduced to a variety of other activities and sports, such as rock climbing, scuba diving, trap-shooting and sled hockey. The U.S. Secret Service will also teach a course on self-defense for people with disabilities.

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Winter Clinic 2/2/2/2

This year, for the first time at the clinic, veteran athletes can set their sights higher, thanks to an agreement between the United States Olympic Committee and VA signed on Nov. 17, 2005. Clinic participants will now be introduced to racing techniques and other Paralympic sports such as wheelchair fencing. The clinic's own Chris Devlin-Young, recent silver medalist in the men's downhill skiing competition during the 2006 Paralympics in Torino, will ski at the clinic and take part in this first-ever race training and development program. Devlin-Young and U.S. Olympic coaches will be on hand to teach racing skills and philosophy as well as to identify those veterans with Paralympic potential.

"There is a true sense of community and a deep bond among veterans," said DAV National Commander Paul W. Jackson. "You feel it very strongly at the clinic. During this week, those brave men and women who have shared sacrifices in battle forge an even stronger bond through teamwork and competition. The DAV is proud to join VA in staging this 20th Winter Sports Clinic. Having participated in the clinic myself, it's an honor to return as DAV's national commander to support such an incredible event."

Clay Walker, country music entertainer, will perform Thursday, April 6, at 9 p.m. Actress Bo Derek, national honorary chairperson for VA's rehabilitation special events, will also be present during the week to meet with the veterans.

Updates, photos and news releases about these events and participating veterans will be posted on the Winter Sports Clinic Web site during the week, at www.wintersportsclinic.org under "Participant Information."

VA continues to be a recognized leader in rehabilitation, with recreational therapy programs at each of its 154 hospitals allowing disabled veterans to challenge themselves both physically and emotionally. DAV, which has co-sponsored the event since 1991, is a nonprofit, congressionally chartered veterans service organization, with a membership of more than one million wartime disabled veterans.

For further information, contact:

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- *Log on to the event's web site at: www.wintersportsclinic.org*